

MEETING MINUTES
Lowcountry Area Transportation Study (LATS)
Meeting of the Policy Committee
Friday, June 27, 2014 – 10:00 a.m.
TCL New River Campus Board Room – Bluffton, SC

LCOG staff sent agenda packets to Policy Committee members and posted an agenda in the lobby of the LCOG office at least 24 hours prior to the meeting time.

Policy Committee Members Present:

Chairman Drew Laughlin, Mayor Town of Hilton Head Island
David Blauch, Chairman LRTA Board
Bronco Bostick, Mayor City of Hardeeville
Barbara Clark, Chairwoman Jasper County Council
Sam Glover, Commissioner SCDOT
Paul Sommerville, Chairman Beaufort County Council
Lisa Sulka, Mayor Town of Bluffton

Policy Committee Designees Present: None

Policy Committee Members Absent:

Sen. Tom Davis, Beaufort County Leg. Delegation Chairman
Billy Keyserling, Mayor City of Beaufort
Clifton Parker, Commissioner SCDOT
Samuel E. Murray, Mayor Town of Port Royal
Rep. Bill Herbkersman, Jasper County Leg. Delegation Chairman

Technical Committee Members Present:

James Ayers, Town of Bluffton*
LeNolon Edge, Jasper County
Mary Lou Franzoni, LRTA Interim Executive Director
Jill Foster, Town of Hilton Head Island
Karen Jarrett, Town of Bluffton

Technical Committee Members Absent:

Linda Bridges, Town of Port Royal
Colin Kinton, Beaufort County
Lauren Kelly, City of Beaufort
Rob McFee, Beaufort County *
Darrin Shoemaker, Town of Hilton Head Island *

(*) Non-voting Member

SCDOT Staff Present:

Mark Pleasant, SCDOT Statewide Planning Chief
Mike Sullivan, SCDOT Area Planning Engineer– Via Teleconference

LCOG Staff Present:

Ginnie Kozak, Planning Director
Jonathan Sherwood, Community and Regional Planner

Others Present:

Paula Porter, LRTA Finance Director
Brana Snowden, City of Hardeeville Planning Director
David Spisso, City of Hardeeville Council

1. Call to Order

Chairman, Mr. Laughlin called the meeting to order.

a. Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Laughlin led the group in the pledge of allegiance.

b. Invocation

Ms. Clark led the invocation

c. Introduction of Members, Guest and Staff

Mrss. Laughlin asked those in attendance to make introductions.

d. Action on January, 2013 Minutes

Ms. Sulka moved to approve the minutes of the January 24, 2014 meeting of the Policy Committee, Mr. Bostick seconded it and the motion passed unanimously.

2. Old Business

a. Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Update – Ginnie Kozak

Ms. Kozak talked about the steady progress being made on the LRTP. The document is expected to be finished in January of 2015. She said there had been great success with the Public Participation Plan (PPP) and the online survey with over 650 people participating. Technical Committee members have been working with the consultants on data analysis issues.

b. Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Update – Ginnie Kozak

Ms. Kozak said that the first draft of the Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) has been submitted and returned with comments. She recommended a resolution by the Policy Committee to approve and submit a revised final draft UPWP to FHWA. Mr. Blauch motioned to submit a final draft to FHWA, Mr. Sommerville seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

3. New Business

a. SCDOT Staff Presentation- Mike Sullivan & Mark Pleasant

Mr. Sullivan talked about a scenario developed by SCDOT staff to finance widening US 17 from Georgia to SC 315. The widening of US 17 is currently estimated at between \$40 and \$50 million, compared to the original estimate of \$20 million; that amount had been allocated by LCOG before the formation of the LATS MPO. For the purposes of this scenario, the cost estimate is \$45 million. A new bridge over the Back River to accommodate two additional lanes is estimated to cost about \$15 million with half of the cost expected to be incurred by LCOG and LATS, and the other half by Georgia DOT, per preliminary negotiations between SCDOT and GDOT. In order to fully fund the widening and new bridge, both LATS and LCOG would require a Guideshare advancement and subsequent payback. In order to prevent chasing inflation, the Guideshare payback period is held to three years. In order to have available funding for US 17, the SC 68 project in Hampton County would have to be delayed until 2022 at which time funding would be available to implement the SC 68 widening.

The debt service incurred by the Lowcountry COG has been split between the new LATS MPO and the remaining COG area. Ninety percent of the COG's 27-in-7 bonding program occurred in what is now the MPO, so the scenario splits the debt service at 90% to LATS and the remaining 10% to LCOG.

Ms. Kozak spoke about LCOG's meeting of the Board of Directors the night before (6/26). A discussion took place and a vote was taken on LCOG's financial participation in the US 17 widening scenario. LCOG's board unanimously voted to not participate in the funding scenario presented by SCDOT. Ms. Kozak handed out a summary of LCOG's position on the matter (attached). She emphasized that the Board agrees that the project is needed, but that the members do not feel that all of LCOG's limited transportation funding should be committed to this one project. The Board emphasized that funding for all projects is limited and the full cost of the US 17 project is still uncertain. The board suggested that, instead, immediate improvements to the pavement surface and shoulder conditions with both LCOG and MPO funds. Ms. Kozak talked about the need for improvements, considering 86 crashes occurred, with five fatalities, during the most recent three-year period. Projected traffic will lead to significant congestion in the coming years. Ms. Jarrett added that truck traffic will likely destroy any minor improvements made to the roadway, thereby essentially wasting the money spent. Mr. Laughlin asked if resurfacing costs have been projected. Mr. Pleasant said that cost estimates have not been made for resurfacing.

Mr. Sullivan talked about the seismic requirements that have caused significant increases to the cost of the widening project. Ms. Sulka asked why the seismic issue has just recently come up in the discussion. Mr. Sullivan explained that as the environmental conditions were examined, soil samples revealed much poorer soils than were previously thought to be present. With new FHWA seismic standards a new approach to construction was needed.

Mr. Sommerville asked about the cost and likelihood of more increases. He noted that the full cost of the project will not be known until all the design work is completed. Mr. Blaich wondered if the design and environmental work could be completed despite the lack of funding to proceed with construction. Ms. Foster asked if Georgia has been approached about the scenario. Mr. Pleasant explained that the plan hinges on local approval and the need to approach Georgia with a financial plan. He noted that it would be one of the largest COG/MPO projects in the state. He also said that SCDOT understands the project would require sacrificing all other road projects in the Region for approximately eight years. Mr. Pleasant said, without a funding plan, it would be hard to proceed with engineering per FHWA requirements, but he would look into possibilities.

Ms. Clark emphasized the importance of the project for the future Jasper Ocean Terminal. Members noted that, while the project represents a significant amount of

money to the Lowcountry MPO and COG, being all of the Guideshare funds for a number of years, it's a relatively small number compared to the expected cost of the future Jasper Port. Ms. Clark said that if the US 17 project is further delayed, the cost is only likely to increase. Members discussed broaching the subject with community, business and political leaders who have been active in the development of the Jasper Ocean Terminal. Ms. Foster brought up the example of how the Orlando area paid for and developed roadways with the anticipation of Walt Disney World before it was built. Mr. Pleasant noted that Florida's highway system is a state funded system as opposed to South Carolina's federally funded system.

Ms. Sulka wondered about the possibility of leaving the \$9 million allocated by LCOG for the SC 68 widening project and finding replacement funding elsewhere. She noted Hampton County's rural environment and socioeconomic conditions and how it must seem that they have been overlooked for projects in the past. Mr. Pleasant said that there are limited options for funding scenarios and any alternatives would have to go through special consideration by the SCDOT Commission for approval. To date, that \$9 million is an integral part of the funding for the US 17 project.

Mr. Bostick suggested increasing the gas taxes to provide more money for transportation improvements. Mr. Glover, saying his time on the SCDOT Commission has been limited, but he has noticed more talk about increasing the gasoline tax. He said that he is familiar with the poor condition of the segment of US 17 and how it will be rich in development in the coming years. He emphasized the importance of using a prioritization system for choosing the projects. Ms. Kozak noted that the COG has a decision-making prioritization matrix that has been utilized for several years now. Mr. Pleasant explained how it was part of State Act 117, which helps quantify the need for transportation projects. Ms. Kozak will provide a copy of the matrix, developed by LCOG and SCDOT, to show how the US 17 and SC 68 projects compare, in terms of prioritization. Mr. Bostick said that since the prioritization work has already been done, it is important to push to raise the gas tax.

Mr. Laughlin asked how useful the \$40-50 million number really is. Ms. Kozak said that both the MPO and COG boards are concerned with the cost estimates. Mr. Pleasant said that it is a starting number for planning purposes, but tie-in to the Georgia side and bridge work are significant factors. He said he is optimistic about the estimates and that the cost could just as easily go down as it could up. Mr. Sommerville asked if the existing two-lane bridge could be used on an interim basis until financing is available to build a new one. He wondered if there are structural issues with the bridge. Mr. Pleasant said that he would look at the question, but mentioned that Federal Highways (FHWA) might not approve of their funds being used on a bridge considered to be in substandard condition (which is why it is

being replaced.).

Ms. Clark suggested a joint MPO/COG meeting. MPO Policy Committee members agreed. Mr. Laughlin suggested sooner rather than later, but also keeping in mind conflicts with summer vacations. Ms. Kozak said that she would coordinate the meeting. Several meeting spaces were mentioned, emphasizing the importance of a neutral location such as TCL. Ms. Clark volunteered the Jasper County Administration Building. Mr. Glover emphasized that the Commission would be looking for the two organizations to work together cooperatively on this and other projects.

4. Other Business

None.

5. Adjourn

Mr. Laughlin asked if there was a motion to adjourn at 11:30 a.m. Mr. Blauch made a motion to adjourn, Ms. Clark seconded it and the motion was unanimously approved.